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AUTHOR Snead, Bertram H.; Lutz, Frank W.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to examine the conditions effecting teacher-principal joint operationalization of rules as these related to perceived mutual needs. Using the field study methodology of participant observation, the researcher observed and recorded the daily interactions between teachers and the principal in an urban elementary school setting. A model of the process of mutual rule conversion is developed describing conditions necessary for modifying the intent of rules. Willingness or unwillingness coincided with participants' belief systems, the morality of the specific issue, mutual concern and respect for individuals, or acceptance of one of a set of undesirable alternatives. (Author)

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CONVERTING AUTHORITY TO LEADERSHIP: THE PRINCIPAL'S RULE ADMINISTRATION

by

Bertram H. Snead
School District of Philadelphia

and

Frank W. Lutz
The Pennsylvania State University

INTRODUCTION

The local school district operates on the basis of state mandated regulations, policies of the local school board, and administrative directives developed in central office. Until quite recently, teachers played a fairly insignificant role in the development of school district policies and in the formulation of standard practices prescribing their role and participation in system decision-making processes. With the sharp upsurge in overt militancy by teacher groups, coupled with state legislation on collective negotiations, and bolstered by gains won at the bargaining table, the present role of teachers and teacher organizations has sharply increased. The subsequent change in status and concomitant shift in the power base away from school boards and administrators have given teachers a greater voice in the operation of individual schools and the local school district.

The agreement between the school board and the representative teacher organization may be viewed as a set of rules the employer and the union mutually agree to observe in order to ensure smooth, efficient operation as well as the just, equitable, and proper treatment of teachers and others covered by the agreement.¹ Such a document represents a compromise--an

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attempt to balance the needs and wishes of the school district on one hand, and the needs and wishes of teachers on the other hand.

Within the framework of this pact between teachers and their employer, the grievance procedure provides for the adjudication of disputes and the rectification of possible errors of interpretation and administration. Under this procedure, teachers may initiate punitive action against administrators and in so doing invoke rules which negatively sanction types of administrative behavior. The administrator also has a set of rules and sanctions to invoke against teachers. Rules, thus employed by teachers and by administrators, serve as a double-edged sword to be wielded by either against the other.

Each instance of teacher-administrator conflict is fraught with the potential that rules and counter-rules will be invoked to gain partisan advantage. In such an atmosphere reconciliation and consensus must be sought to resolve issues and to restore relationships that might otherwise hamper efficient educational operation. It is suggested that such resolution may not be effected through the further imposition of existing rules. Rather, it is proposed that in areas where sentiments and values fairly coincide, the parties can agree to operationalize rules in ways and under conditions which are mutually satisfying.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine under what conditions teachers and principal in an urban elementary school setting would agree to operationalize existing rules in ways which satisfied mutually felt needs and/or organizational purposes.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The rapid economic expansion which occurred in the United States between 1880-1910 was accompanied by labor-management conflicts in which managerial authority was threatened by increased unionization and greater worker demands.² Managers, in response, sought to maximize worker efforts and to improve efficiency by developing work procedures and administrative practices which left goal setting, decision-making, and problem-solving solely in the hands of management.³ The climate created by these conditions and the emphasis placed on scientific management necessitated new thinking to ameliorate widespread discontent between management and labor.

Within the next quarter century, the "human relations" school of administrative thought emerged as another approach. Foremost among its advocates was Mary Parker Follett who stressed the participative role of workers in the decision-making process. Parker contended that the management of a company could be greatly improved by joint employer-employee involvement in which workers were encouraged to view their efforts as pursuing objectives shared commonly with employers.⁴ The two studies in the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company spearheaded by Mayo in 1925 and 1927 further advanced the notion that concern for the employee can lead to higher productivity and increased efficiency. Specifically, the results of the studies point directly to the effects of social conditions in the work place and the impact of these conditions on world output and the organization's goals.⁵ Barnard, who conceived organizations as cooperative systems (voluntary relationships between people and organizations toward common goals), emphasized the need for consideration of employees in the attainment of organizational objectives.⁶ He later joined with Herbert Simon and

together they conceptualized a theory of "inducement-contribution" which postulated that output and efficiency are directly related to inducement (wages and incentives).⁷

More recent researchers such as Likert maintain that the most skillful management requires employee participation in management affairs and the integrating of the needs of the individual with the objectives of the organization.⁸ The concept of goal integration (the mutual satisfaction of individual and organizational goals) is presented extensively in the writings of Argyris and Barrett.⁹ Similarly the Blake and Mouton grid -- a conceptualization of team management -- plots the variables of concern for people and the concern for production to determine at what point these items merge. These latter two writers conclude from their studies that the soundest way to proceed is to permit those involved to share ideas and to think through problems in an atmosphere replete with trust and confidence among members of the organization.¹⁰ Gore feels that in every organization there are quite distinct aggregations of people with independent purposes who seek to fulfill these by displaying various kinds of behavior. Leaders and decision-makers, in order to be effective and to minimize possible tension, have the responsibility to endeavor to arrange these purposes around a set of shared objectives.¹¹

Writers in the field of school administration have expressed quite similar views. Getzel and Guba approach educational administration as a social process and offer a model which includes institutional (organizational needs) and personal (individual needs) dimensions. With these as the focus, the unique task of administration is to integrate the demands of the institution and the demands of staff members in a way that is at once organizationally productive and individually fulfilling.¹² Halpin, to advocates

increased administrative concern for the integration of organizational and individual goals. His formulation of a concept of leadership stresses "consideration"--concern for the welfare of subordinates--and "initiating structure"--emphasis on production and the maximization of worker effort. He posits that effective leadership occurs as these variables are mutually satisfied.¹³

The literature thus offers considerable evidence that: (1) in an organizational setting the needs of both the individual and those of the organization must be recognized and met, and (2) the fulfillment of those needs most often occurs in a setting where participants share in the decision-making process. Such mutual involvement takes place within a framework of formalized understandings--establishes rules, procedures, and agreements. It remains necessary, at this juncture, to find a model of organizational behavior by which to gauge the actions of a school administrator and members of the professional staff of a school with regard to their use of formal procedures to achieve either personal or school district objectives.

Gouldner proposes a model for analyzing behavior in which rules are administered in an organizational setting.¹⁴ The model offers three classifications of rule administration: (1) representative, (2) mock, and (3) punishment-centered. Representative rule administration is typified by joint support or operationalization of rules and both employer and employee conform to and enforce the rule. Mock rule administration is characterized by indifference to or the ignoring of rules imposed by outside agents. Punishment-centered rule administration is typified by conflict between the rule enforcer and the party affected by the rule. Considerable tension is thus generated. Lutz and Evans first operationalized this model in an educational setting.¹⁵

Employing the Gouldner model as a guide and with goal integration and shared decision-making as vital elements, the following assumptions were developed and examined for this study.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. Teachers and the principal will tend to modify certain types of punishment-centered rules in a representative fashion by agreeing to operationalize those rules in ways which satisfy mutually felt needs.

2. Teachers and the principal will tend to modify certain types of previously developed representative rules by agreeing to reformulate those rules and to conduct themselves in ways which are more mutually satisfying.

3. Teachers and the principal will tend to relate to certain types of rules in a mock fashion by agreeing to operate in ways which ignore all or parts of those rules.

4. Teachers and the principal will agree to live with certain types of punishment-centered rules when the principal masks his enforcement of those rules with bureaucratic requirements.

5. Teachers and the principal will confer about but will not agree to operationalize certain types of punishment-centered rules in any ways other than those explicitly stated by the rules. Thus, these rules will remain punishment-centered and will not be converted to representative rules.

METHOD

Procedures

The study was conducted in an elementary school setting in the City of Philadelphia whose pupil population was approximately 850 children and with a staff of thirty teachers. The researcher made observations for a period of five months with attention being given to the day-to-day

relationships between the school principal and members of the professional teaching staff.

Employing the field research method of participant observation, the researcher assumed the role of participant as an observer.¹⁶ In that capacity, he noted and recorded data which related to principal-teacher interaction, which constituted of relevant information available from school and school district records and reports, and which included other information offered by an informant group consisting of various curriculum specialists, the school counselor, and the administrative assistant to the principal.

Continuous daily observations were made and recorded as soon as possible following each incident. On those occasions where pre-arranged conferences, meetings, and interviews occurred, any written record of those proceedings, either made by the researcher or another member of the group, became a data source which was incorporated into the body of accumulated data for the purposes of the study.

The major focus of the study was centered on the manner in which rules were administered in an educational setting. It is presupposed that all types of rules, whether developed internally or externally to that setting, may be used as initially proposed or operationalized differentially depending on the individual or collective intent of the principal and/or the teachers. With that understanding, the researcher sought to determine under what conditions types of rules might be enforced as intended or were modified to serve the joint purposes of the principal and members of the professional teaching staff.

Using the definitions developed from the Gouldner model, the researcher classified each incident under one of the three headings of rule administration.

1. Representative Rule Related Incidents--These were incidents which related to rules the teachers and the principal agreed to operationalize in ways other than those expressly stated by the rules.
2. Mock Rule Related Incidents--There were incidents which related to rules developed externally to the school setting and which the teachers and the principal generally ignored.
3. Punishment-Centered Rule Related Incidents--There were incidents relating to rules which the teacher and the principal accepted as given, which one party used and was perceived as punishment by the other, and which took the form of written policies and procedures.

DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher looked for consistent patterns of behavior which would either verify or modify assumptions developed in the conceptual framework. It was anticipated that the patterns could be accepted as valid if they described normal teacher and/or principal effort to satisfy individual or mutual ends. It was further anticipated that other types of behavior, to be considered as deviant, would be evident and would serve to create unanticipated conditions or circumstances thus modifying the original assumptions.

Assumption #1 - Teachers and the principal will tend to modify certain types of punishment-centered rules in a representative fashion by agreeing to operationalize those rules in ways which satisfy mutually felt needs.

There is sufficient data in the study to support this assumption. Punishment-centered rules were regularly converted through a process of discussion and joint agreement by the teachers and the principal. Although there were numerous data related to the supported assumptions, for the sake of brevity only one example per assumption will be presented here.

Example

Rule 1 - "All children arriving after 9:00 a.m. are to be considered late for school. These children are to report to the school office, secure a 'late slip,' and submit that slip to the teacher before being admitted to class."

Rule 2 - "The present teacher day for the elementary school is from 8:45 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., which includes one hour and fifteen minutes for lunch."

Incident - Many children arrived at school within a few minutes following the 9:00 a.m. bell. This creates long lines of "late" children in the school office who each received a "late slip" and in certain classrooms where each child was interviewed and where the slips were collected and checked. To offset these delays, the principal had the school clocks set back by five minutes.

In a staff meeting the teacher union representative complained that setting the clocks back penalized teachers. Even though their work day was not changed (according to the school clocks). These teachers were, in essence, being detained five minutes beyond "Greenwich time." Due to the personal schedules and personal demands of some teachers, the principal should be required to have the clocks set correctly.

A discussion ensued in which other staff members insisted the clocks remain five minutes early. They indicated they felt that the practice of setting back the clocks⁵ did lessen the number of "late" children. It was finally agreed that the clocks remain five minutes early until condition dictated otherwise.

Assumption #2 - Teachers and the principal will tend to modify certain types of previously developed representative rules by agreeing to reformulate those rules and to conduct themselves in ways which are more mutually satisfying.

There is little in the data to support his assumption. Since representative rules develop in the local school setting through discussion and are derived by consensus, both the teachers and the principal abide by these without further modification. Although it was assumed in the study that all types of rules, including representative rules, would be modified, this did not occur during the period in which the study was conducted.

Assumption #3 - Teachers and the principal will tend to relate to certain types of rules in a mock fashion by agreeing to operate in ways which ignore all or parts of those rules.

The data does indicate that this assumption has some validity. However, modification to mock rules did not occur regularly enough to demonstrate that this is an important aspect of rule adaptation.

Example

Rule - "There is to be no smoking in the school building except in those areas specifically designated by the School District of Philadelphia and approved by the Philadelphia Fire Department.

Note - The school principal had advised all staff members that smoking was to be confined to the teachers' lounges (after seeing several of them smoking at tables or desks in the classrooms but not criticizing these teachers for doing so).

Incident - At the close of school, several days after the Easter holidays, a fire erupted in one of the Grade Four classrooms.

One of the custodial aides who was nearby quickly entered the room and poured water on the burning material.

The Fire Department was called and several firemen arrived including a fire inspector. Following an investigation, the inspector told the principal that someone had dropped a pack of lighted matches into an Easter basket located on a small table in one corner of the room. The inspector then asked, "Do the teachers smoke in the rooms?" In response, the principal replied "Our staff is fully aware there is to be no smoking in classrooms. Smoking is to occur in the teachers' lounges only. Our staff knows this, and they know this is what should be done."

Assumption #4 - Teachers and the principal will agree to live with certain types of punishment-centered rules when the principal masks his enforcement of those rules with bureaucratic requirements.

The data show that this assumption can be supported. Basically the principal informs individual teachers or the staff as a whole that they must perform certain tasks demanded by the system or dictated by the needs of the school.

Example

Rule - Teachers were required to submit weekly lesson plans each Thursday to the principal's office.

Incident - Several veteran teachers came to the principal to recommend discontinuation of the practice of submitting weekly lesson plans. They indicated that he knew the calibre of their work and that they could teach just as well without writing a detailed plan. In response, the principal indicated that he was

not at all displeased with their performances but required lesson plans for several reasons. First, the plans gave him some idea of the kinds of instructional programs they were conducting. As the principal, it was necessary for him to know this, and it wasn't possible for him to get into every room each week. Secondly, the plans served as a guide and a help to substitute teachers. Since neither he nor the teachers knew when they might become ill or have to leave school due to an emergency, the lesson plan was available to be used by anyone called in to replace the regular classroom teacher.

Assumption #5 - Teachers and the principal will confer about but will not agree to operationalize certain types of punishment-centered rules in any ways other than those explicitly stated by the rules. Thus, these rules will remain punishment-centered and will not be converted to representative rules.

Substantially, the condition of "no agreement" and the imposition of punishment-centered rules both by teachers and the principal occurred frequently in the study. In many instances where consensus was sought, generally though an attempt to gain some commonality of feeling and understanding, often one or the other of the parties refused to relinquish their punishment power.

Example

Rule - "All school keys held by members of the instructional staff are to be placed in the metal key box in the office at the end of the school day."

Incident I - Several teachers came to the principal, on a number of occasions, to request permission to hold keys overnight with

the assurance that the keys would not be lost. On each occasion, the principal informed the teachers that the practice of taking school keys from the building was not acceptable. Other than the fact that the keys might be lost, the principal expressed the fear that a finder might then use the keys to enter rooms to vandalize or to steal.

Note - Bringing the keys to the office at the close of the day required teachers to exit from the building via a doorway some distance from their classrooms. Teachers requesting permission to hold their keys were among those who would prefer to leave by an exit door nearer the classrooms and not through the door near the school office.

Rule - "Faculty meetings may be held twice monthly. Time for these meetings shall not extend more than one-half hour beyond the close of the regular school day."

Incident - A special staff development program emphasizing nutrition education had been developed in cooperation with the District Superintendent's Office. When the training staff arrived, the principal asked the training leader how much time was needed for the first presentation. The training leader stated that a minimum of two hours was required. The principal consulted the teacher union representative regarding an extension of 15 minutes beyond normal faculty meeting time (regular meetings lasted one hour and 45 minutes). The representative replied, "The teachers expect the meeting to end at 3:15 p.m.--not 3:30 p.m. Some of them have responsibilities which require that they leave promptly. I'm sorry, Mr. S., that meeting must be over by 3:15 p.m."

Additional Analysis

The results of the study show that three circumstances occurred regularly. First, the conversion of punishment-centered rules into representative type rules took place throughout the data collection period. The principal or the teachers initiated procedures which were directed toward consensus and which resulted in applying rules in ways not originally intended. These interactions were precipitated by some felt need to seek concurrence on issues so that one or both parties could accomplish a task or could escape from some dilemma. Generally, the issues were centered around personal needs (where teachers were concerned) and around organizational needs (where the principal was concerned).

Secondly, punishment-centered rules were invoked both by the principal and by teachers against the other with no agreement to operationalize those rules differently at those times. In order to gain some desired advantage, one or the other of the parties insisted that the rules were to be enforced as stated. There were instances of no agreement and imposition of punishment-centered rules without conversion occurring more frequently than any type of rule modification.

Thirdly, despite the ubiquitous nature of rules, occasions did arise where there was no specific rule to govern the collective behavior of teachers and the principal. In the instances where this was true, a teacher or teachers would confer with the principal (or he with them) to decide on an acceptable course of action. Thus, a representative type rule would be developed. Such a rule generally replaced what one or the other of the parties previously considered to be good common sense or cover some point on which there had been no prior agreement. In this way a concern which could generate conflict and tension was resolved through mutual involvement and the decision could be established as a pattern for future decision-making.

In addition, as an unanticipated outcome of the study, the data show that teachers often used the principal as a rule enforcer. There are repeated instances in the study of a teacher coming to the principal to insist that some punishment-centered rule should be used against another teacher so that the complainant could gain some desired end. As an example, the Grade Three teachers agreed to a schedule for the organization and instruction of mathematics classes. When the grade leader attempted to alter that schedule without consultation with his Grade Three colleagues, two of those teachers complained to the principal. A meeting was held, the previously accepted scheduling procedures were reviewed, and the grade leader agreed to abide by the schedule without variation.

CONCLUSIONS

The data support assumptions #1, #4, and #5. Representative rules, once developed, were maintained without further reformulation during the data collection period. Perhaps over a long time span (say two years) such rules would be renegotiated.

Although there is some evidence that mock rule behavior does take place, this evidence pertains primarily to the enforcement of fire regulations. This was also the condition in both the Gouldner study and the Lutz and Evans study.

The major emphasis of the research was to determine under what conditions rules were operationalized in which differed from the language of the rules. From the results of the study it may be concluded that the participants would be willing to engage in a process of mutual rule conversion if one or more of the following conditions exist.

The participants will engage in a process of mutual rule conversion to

the degree that:

1. both parties jointly feel that some benefit will result which is mutually satisfying to teachers and the principal alike.
2. the issue involves one or more individuals about which both the teachers and the principal have positive sentiments.
3. the issue demands action and the action can only be taken by accepting one of a set of undesirable alternatives.
4. the issue involves resolving a difficulty which stands in the way of accomplishing a task by one party which coincides with the expectations of the other party.
5. the issue involved is not normally covered by prescribed rules but some agreement is needed to ameliorate an uncomfortable circumstance.

With the above conclusions in mind, it is now possible to restate the assumptions developed for the study and to create a new conceptual model.

Teachers and the principal will:

1. modify certain types of punishment-centered rules in a representative fashion by agreeing to operationalize those rules in ways which lead to kinds of mutual satisfactions which they seek for themselves and for others.
2. modify other types of punishment-centered rules in a representative fashion by agreeing to operationalize those rules in ways which they mutually perceive as means of accomplishing a desired task or of removing an unpleasant circumstance.
3. relate occasionally to certain types of rules in a mock fashion by agreeing to operate in ways which ignore all or parts of those rules.

4. agree to live with certain types of punishment-centered rules when the principal masks his enforcement of those rules with bureaucratic requirements.
5. confer about but will not agree to operationalize certain types of punishment-centered rules in any ways other than those ways explicitly stated by the rules. Thus these rules remain punishment-centered and are not converted to representative rules.

In addition,

6. Teachers, in order to achieve some personal end will insist that the principal should enforce types of punishment-centered rules against other teachers without modification. In this way a punishment-centered rule is invoked by one teacher against the other with the requirement that the principal is to act as rule enforcer.

Note: It was not possible to present all of the relevant data from the study in this paper. However, the additional data (not herein presented) makes it possible to formulate the above model.

RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

The focus of the study was to determine under what conditions teachers and the principal would operationalize rules in ways not intended by the language of the rules. It is evident, based on the data, that frequently occasions do arise when the conversion process occurs depending on the kinds of mutual agreement required. However, it must be assumed that certain delimiting factors in the school environment, i.e., location, size of enrollment, age and experience of the staff, and others, may bear directly on the outcomes. If such an assumption is valid, further studies of this nature may

produce other conditions under which teachers and principals are able to gain consensus.

In addition, the study did reveal that often the principal is employed as a rule enforcer by one teacher against other teachers. This researcher was not able to uncover much evidence in the literature which showed that this phenomenon had been studied to any degree. Therefore, this whole matter appears fertile ground for further investigation.

FOOTNOTES

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